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Environmental Health & Safety From Experience

Countdown to 2026: New EPA Rules on HFCs

For many years, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has regulated refrigerants that pose environmental risks, beginning with chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) and hydrochlorofluorocarbons (HCFCs) under 40 CFR Part 82. These compounds, once widely used in industrial refrigeration, were restricted due to their contribution to ozone layer depletion. Facilities operating systems with CFC/HCFC refrigerants have been subject to strict requirements, including certified technician servicing, labeling, recordkeeping, leak rate calculations, and mandatory reporting of excessive leaks. Since 2018, technicians have also been required to document disposal of appliances containing between 5 and 50 pounds of CFC/HCFC refrigerants, and facilities must retain certifications and service records for seven years.

Beginning January 1, 2026, the regulatory landscape is set to shift again. Under the American Innovation and Manufacturing (AIM) Act, implemented through 40 CFR Part 84 Appendix A, the EPA will begin phasing down hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs) not because of potential ozone depletion, but due to their relatively high global warming potential. Through this legislation, the manufacture of new equipment using [the regulated HFCs](#) will be prohibited. While the law allows existing equipment using regulated HFCs to continue to operate, equipment containing **15 pounds or more** of regulated HFCs will now face compliance obligations similar to those applied to CFCs and HCFCs. For example, under Subpart C of Part 84 (Management of Regulated Substances), owners and operators must adhere to the following actions when repairing leaks:

- Use certified technicians for maintenance or repair work.
- Repair leaks that exceed the following thresholds:
 - o 30% leak rate for industrial process refrigeration
 - o 20% leak rate for commercial refrigeration
 - o 10% leak rate for comfort cooling
- Complete repairs within 30 days (or 120 days if an industrial process shutdown is required). (Extensions allowed under certain circumstances (84.106(f)).)
- Conduct verification testing within 30 days (120 days for shutdowns).

- Perform follow-up verification testing within 10 days of the initial test.
- Conduct leak inspections per the schedules outlined in (84.106(g)) after successful follow-up verification testing.
- Submit retrofit or retirement plans within 30 days if leaks cannot be repaired (84.106(h)), and implement retrofit or retirement schedules within one year, with extensions permitted under certain conditions (84.106(i)).
- Report electronically through the EPA's reporting platform (84.106(m)).
- Maintain records for at least three years, and these must be maintained by the owner/operator (84.106(l)).

To prepare for this new rule, facilities should review their refrigerant inventories, confirm technician certifications, and ensure equipment meets EPA standards. Proactive compliance will be essential as inspection and enforcement activities continue to expand.

EXPERIENCE IN BRIEF

Looking for a quick reference on refrigerants? A detailed table developed by Canadian trade group HRAI provides refrigerant classifications, key properties, and possible replacement options in one place. Access it [here!](#)

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